# PRACTICAL HINTS
# ON
# COMPOSITION IN PAINTING

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# PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

# COMPOSITION IN PAINTING.

ILLUSTRATED BY

## Examples from the Great Masters

OF THE

## ITALIAN, FLEMISH, AND DUTCH SCHOOLS.

BY JOHN BURNET.

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"Invention is one of the great marks of genius; but, if we consult experience, we shall find, that it is by being conversant with the inventions of others that we learn to invent, as, by reading the thoughts of others, we learn to think."—SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

*LONDON:*

PRINTED FOR THE PROPRIETOR;

AND SOLD BY W. H. CARPENTER, LOWER BROOK STREET.

1822.

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C. Whittingham, College House, Chiswick.

# PREFACE.

THE Plates hereto annexed were originally intended to illustrate the first part of a Practical Essay on Painting, which I have long had in contemplation to publish; but have delayed, from year to year, from its interruption to my professional engagements, from doubts respecting its utility, and a love of ease which, after the day's employment, suggests a more natural recreation than the investigation of an abstruse study: I now publish the plates with a few loose hints thrown together, in the hope of their being useful. Should they be thought of advantage to the younger students of painting, in directing their minds to a regular mode of investigating the intricacies of the art, I shall follow them with others illustrative, in the first instance, of light and shade, and, ultimately, of the arrangement of colour. On the contrary, should the work not be considered a desideratum, by publishing only a first part, I escape a heavy responsibility and expense—a tax to which I do not wish that either my vanity or my love for the fine arts should subject me.

*March* 25, 1822.

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# PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

# COMPOSITION IN PAINTING.

## COMPOSITION.

COMPOSITION is the art of arranging figures or objects, so as to adapt them to any particular subject. In composition four requisites are necessary;—that the story be well told; that it possess a good general form; that it be so arranged as to be capable of receiving a proper effect of light and shade; and that it be susceptible of an agreeable disposition of colour. *The form* of a composition is best suggested by the subject or design, as the fitness of the adaptation ought to appear to emanate from the circumstances themselves: hence the variety of compositions.

The point of time being fixed upon, the action, expression, and incidental circumstances oblige us often to determine on a particular arrangement, that we may be enabled to place the most interesting objects in the most prominent places. Unless our attention be directed to such arrangement in the first instance, we shall often be obliged to put an emphasis on an insignificant object, or throw into repose an interesting point of the action, when we come to consider their relation to a good effect of light and shade.

To secure a good general form in composition, it is necessary that it should be as simple as possible. A confused complicated form may hide the art, but can never invite the attention. Horace, in his Art of Poetry, inculcates the same doctrine, "Denique sit quod vis, simplex duntaxat et unum." Whether this is to be produced by a breadth of light and shade, which is often the case with Rembrandt, even on a most complicated outline, or by the simple arrangement of colour, as we often find in Titian, or by the construction of the group in the first instance, evident in many of Raffaelle's works, must depend upon the taste of the artist: it is sufficient to direct the younger students to this particular, their minds being generally carried away by notions of variety and contrast.

In giving a few examples of composition, I have confined myself to the four simple and principal forms; not only from their being most palpable, but also from their possessing a decided character, which is at all times desirable. To those who imagine that such rules tend to fetter genius, I shall merely quote Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose works, if properly understood, render all other writings on the subject of painting superfluous. "It must, of necessity, be, that even works of genius, like every other effect, as they must have their cause, must likewise have their rules; it cannot be by chance, that excellencies are produced with any constancy or any certainty, for this is not the nature of chance; but the rules, by which men of extraordinary parts and such as are called men of genius work, are either such as they discover by their own peculiar observations, or of such a nice texture as not easily to admit being expressed in words; especially as artists are not very frequently skilful in that mode of communicating ideas. Unsubstantial, however, as these rules may seem, and difficult as it may be to convey them in writing, they are still seen and felt in the mind of the artist; and he works from them with as much certainty as if they were embodied, as I may say, upon paper. It is true, these refined principles cannot be always made palpable, like the more gross rules of art; yet it does not follow, but that the mind may be put in such a train that it shall perceive, by a kind of scientific sense, that propriety which words, par-

ticularly words of unpractised writers such as we are, can but very feebly suggest." *Sixth Discourse.*

To assist in putting the mind in such a train is all that these examples aim at; and to render apparent to the young artist what he will find wrapped up in theoretical disquisition.

The specimens here given, merely happened to be in my possession: there are many others that will serve the student, perhaps better, for illustration, which he ought by all means to procure, or make sketches of, as it is only by rendering himself master of the subject, that he can hope to avoid the commonplace effects which swim upon the surface, and, being palpable, are adopted by every one whose judgment cannot carry him into the intricacies of the art.

Concealing the art is one of its greatest beauties; and he best can accomplish that who can discover it under all its disguises. I ought, however, to caution the young artist on this head, not to be too fastidious in trying to conceal what can be obvious only to a small number; for, in endeavouring to render his design more intricate, he may destroy character, simplicity, and breadth; qualities which affect and are appreciated by every one.

## ANGULAR COMPOSITION.

### *Explanation of Plate I.*

*Fig.* 1. In commencing a composition, it is customary to mark the middle of the space, for the purpose of arranging those points we consider of most importance to the subject; dividing the picture for the regulation of the masses of light and shade, of ascertaining and fixing the horizontal line, &c. This mode of constructing the composition is often suggested from the perspective effect requiring a length of line, thereby obliging us to place the point of sight at one side of the picture: sometimes from the

group requiring a large space; which a diagonal line secures, as in the elevation of the Cross by Rubens, or from the conduct of the light, as in his picture of the Descent from the Cross, &c.

Cuyp, in adopting this mode of composition in most of his pictures (which are generally Sunset or Sunrise), places the focus of light at the bottom of the sky, thereby enabling the distant part of the landscape to melt into it by the most natural means; while the strongest part of his sky, being at the opposite angle, produces the greatest expanse, and mixes and harmonizes with the dark side of the picture. Thus the eye is carried round the composition, until the two extremes are brought in contact, the most prominent with the most retiring.

In compositions constructed on this principle (particularly where the landscape occupies a large portion), many artists carry the lines of the clouds in a contrary direction, to counteract the appearance of all the lines running to one point. Thus using the darks of the clouds, &c. *to antagonize*, as it is termed, may apparently produce a better equipoise, but sacrifices many advantages; for we observe in many of the pictures of Cuyp, Rubens, and Teniers, where the figures, landscape, and sky are all on the same side of the composition, that a rich and soft effect is produced; the strong light and dark touches of the figures telling with great force against a back ground of houses, trees, &c., which are prevented from being harsh and cutting, by mixing their edges with the clouds, or dark blue of the sky. This doubling of the lines (if I may so express it) gives a picture that rich fulness which we often perceive in a first sketch, from its possessing several outlines. Those who imagine, that, by thus throwing the whole composition on one side, a want of union will be produced, will be convinced of their error by perceiving how small an object restores the balance; since, by its being detached and opposed to the most distant part, it receives a tenfold consequence.

*Plate I. fig.* 3 *and* 4. In these compositions Potter has made use of the

Plate I.

# Angular Composition.

Fig. 1.

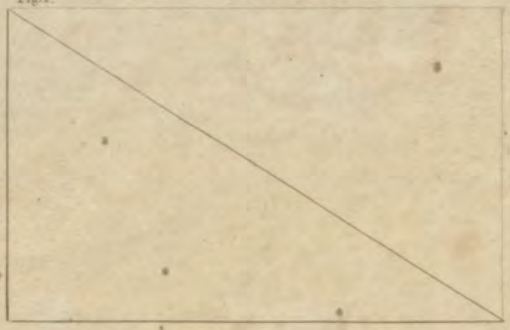

Fig. 2

Cuyp.

Fig. 3.

P. Potter.

Fig. 4.

P. Potter.

Fig. 5.

A. Ostade.

Fig. 6.

Claude.

John Burnet Sc.

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter, Lower Brook Street, June 1st 1829.

sky as a background, by which mode the high lights of his group have more value, and it is rendered less harsh and cutting; which is the case with his famous picture of the Bull, the figures in which are brought up against the light side of the sky. If deception and strong relief were all he aimed at, he has gained them both, though at the expense of some of the higher qualities of the art, "a melting and union," as Reynolds terms it, of the figures with the background. The art is now too far advanced to allow us to be gratified with violent contrast; and a *small portion* of the group coming firm off the ground, is found to be sufficient to give the appearance of natural solidity to the whole.

*Fig.* 5. The original of this sketch, a small etching by Ostade, ought to be in the possession of every artist, for its beautiful arrangement of light and shade, and the skilful way in which they are woven together. As I ought to have noticed above, that the principal mass of light in out of door scenes (both in nature and the best masters) is generally placed in the sky, or upper part of the picture, I may here remark, that in interiors (especially such as are constructed upon this plan) it is generally reversed, the roof and background being reserved for a mass of shadow and repose. Ostade, in his compositions, displays such an ingenuity in their construction as to render his pictures an endless source of gratification and study to the artist. In some of his works, the art is so completely hid as to make it difficult to say, whether his background or figures were the first composed. We have not only objects intercepting each other in the most natural and picturesque manner, but the figures carried up against them; thus coming in contact with various forms different in size, distance, and colour. This, when done with judgment, gives a rich and inartificial effect. On the contrary, in the pictures of Teniers, we often find a number of objects cast down in one corner, evidently for the mere purpose of being painted; which, however, from their situation, their picturesque arrangement, and the mechanical skill of the execution, acquire a force, natural sharpness, and beauty, that amply compensate for the ostentatious display of such excellencies. Tenier's backgrounds are also totally different from

Ostade's principle; his figures being generally surrounded with blank spaces of shadow or half tint. When a story is to be told, that requires the spectator to be directed to the heads and hands for expression and action, this breadth is more allowable; but breadth, as Mr. Fuseli justly observes, ought never to have the appearance of "flatness or insipidity." It is observable that, in an exhibition where there are a number of objects to distract the attention, those pictures please us most on which the eye is allowed to rest, from their possessing a vacant space; but those very pictures uniformly look blank and unfurnished when hung up singly in a room.

*Plate I. fig.* 6. *Plate II. fig.* 1. Claude, in many of his compositions, displays very little address in bringing up his strong dark against the light. In him, it often looks like unaffected primitive simplicity; but it might not be so considered in an artist of the present day. When Claude introduces a figure for such purpose, or in order to give a retiring delicacy to his distance, we often find it of a strong dark blue, which serves also to bring down the same colour from the opposite angle of the sky, thereby producing a union between both sides of the picture. I may notice here the length of line produced by the figures in *fig.* 1, as it assists the perspective effect, in carrying the eye into the picture, serving also as a base line for the landscape to rest upon. When the sun is placed near the point of sight, we sometimes see shadows made use of for the same purpose. A straight line is often necessary also for the sake of variety; and when architecture is not present, we must get it how and where we can.

*Plate II. fig.* 2. Rubens in this landscape has carried the lines of the clouds, trees, and ground all in the same direction; and, from his placing the sun near the point of sight, even his shadows take the same course. When the most prominent or strong dark of the foreground is detached from the side of the picture, it has not only a less formal appearance, but acquires a force from its being cut out on both sides by light; as we shall find when we come to treat of Chiaroscuro. The lights also acquire a force

# Angular Composition

Fig 1.

Claude.

Fig 2.

Rubens.

Fig 3.

P. De Laer.

Fig 4.

Cuyp.

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter, Dover Street, June 1st 1822.

John Thomas Sc.

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and brilliancy from their being surrounded with dark, and the extent of the distance and continuity of the line are not altogether interrupted.

*Plate II. fig.* 3. In this subject, "Huntsman going out in the Morning," we have the principal group of a complete form in itself, yet forming a part of a whole, in consequence of its being carried round by the two dogs in the foreground, and connected by the principal dog in the other group turning round to the noise. As it is a doubt in the minds of some artists, how far it is agreeable to the rules of composition to admit a figure complete in itself as a portion of a group, I shall only observe here, that, as far as form is concerned, their objection cannot apply: and, as to individual parts, we see not only heads and hands complete as to form and light and shade; but we find that even an eye is capable of possessing all the characteristic beauties of the art. In fact, this application of it in the abstract, as well as in the aggregate, pervades every thing.

An object must not only appear to possess those properties adapted by nature for its purpose and protection, but also those qualities which have been found by the experience of the best masters productive of beauty: this renders it a source of gratification; and it is then said to be true to nature and art. For example, if we examine an eye turned from the light, we perceive a breadth of chiaroscuro; the white, or cornea, producing a mass of light, the iris and pupil a mass of shade. We find each of these focused, and a small portion of the strong dark and strong light brought in contact; and the light passing through the iris gives it its transparency, and serves instead of reflected light to clear up the shadow: the watery fluid, in the bottom of the eye and on the under eyelid, gives us that portion of minute finish necessary in all works of art, to which even the protecting hairs contribute. We have here a picture complete in itself; but if we carry our examination to the surrounding lines in the orbit, we perceive a harmonious communication and extension of its form, lights, and darks, by which its harshness is softened and diffused, and it becomes a part of the composition of the whole countenance.

*Plate II. fig.* 4. I have given a gradual advancement of the most prominent and dark part of a composition, until, in this example, we have the strongest point brought into the centre. In the original, "The Embarkation of the Prince of Orange," the two principal figures are dressed in strong red, and strong black, and are the most cutting part of the group; and, from their being brought into the centre and against the most retiring part, and surrounded by light, Cuyp has rendered them of the greatest importance, though occupying only a very small portion of the picture.

## ANGULAR COMPOSITION.

*Plate III. fig.* 1. The plan of composition I have here taken up is in the form of a diamond; which we find often adopted, either as a complete group, or as forming part of a more complicated arrangement. In commencing a composition, I have mentioned, "that it is of importance to mark in those points most necessary to our purpose." For example, when a story is to be told, the heads and hands, the seats of action and expression are often referred to each other for the completion of form or extension of light; as by such means the eye of the spectator is led to the commencement and operation of the incident. After arranging the principal points, what are called "the secondary" require the greatest consideration; whether for the repetition of the lines, extension of the form, or conduct of the light and shade. Sometimes we are actuated by our requiring a second or third group for the better illustration of the story, which naturally leads us in the direction that affords us the greatest space; sometimes by the principal group demanding a considerable portion of the ground for a mass of shadow, beyond which a strong point is required, as a link of communication between the figures and the background. By making this point the strongest of a secondary group of objects, either from its size, lights, or darks, the eye is carried into the most remote circumstances, which become a part of the whole, from the principal group being made to depend upon *such point* for the completion of its form, the extension of the light, or the repetition of colour.

# Angular Composition

Fig 1.

Fig 2.

Fig 3.

Fig 4.

Fig 5.

Fig 6.

Fig 7

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter, Bower Street, Russell Square, June 1st 1822.

*Fig.* 2. In designs constructed upon this plan (especially of the Dutch School), we generally find the lower part of the form strongly pronounced, either by colour, or by light upon a dark ground, or vice versa: this gives the group a firm foundation, and also enables the artist to keep the other objects in their proper situations as to distance from the eye. I wish particularly to direct the student's attention to this particular, as a doctrine, founded upon the rays of vision, has been attempted to be established, viz. that objects as they recede from the centre of the picture, either to the sides or bottom, ought to be deprived of part of their force of light and shade and colour. This is neither nature nor art. If the subject requires those objects to be kept subordinate, true art does not deprive them of their natural force, by robbing them of their lights, darks, or colours: it renders them less obtrusive by the ground which surrounds them, or substitutes other objects of a less attractive quality.

*Plate III. fig.* 3. By making the circumstance from which the story springs a strong point (either from situation, force, or colour), and surrounding it with those objects more immediately connected and most illustrative of its effects, the picture explains itself at a glance; which is one of the strong distinctions of painting from poetry,—the one proceeding in a circuitous route to hide the denouement and keep hold of the attention, the other proclaiming instantaneously the beginning and end of the story. I do not mean that the circumstance ought always to occupy the centre, any more than that the hero should always occupy the centre; but, as it is of use to explain the cause of his action and expression, it has, in my mind, a prior claim to consideration.

*Plate III. fig.* 4 *and* 6. *Plate IV. fig.* 5. We have the strongest light coming in contact with the strong dark in the most cutting manner, in the knee and leg of the falling figure, the arm of the man writing, and in the head of the infant Christ. When this can be done without interfering with the breadth of light, it is of the greatest consequence, both on account of

its giving a thickness or rotundity to the group, and also because it enables us to keep the most projecting points and the most retiring in their proper places by analogy to one another. I am aware that the management of light and shade often requires a sacrifice, of this principle; where we can accomplish our object without such a sacrifice it has always the most natural appearance. Many accidental combinations and beautiful effects of nature arise, not merely from their possessing a good general form and a pictorial arrangement of light and shade, but also from the most projecting points being often assisted by a combination of a harsh cutting line, strong dark and light, or opposition of local colour, and hence they strike the artist as being applicable to painting; these being the means he finds frequently adopted by the best masters. It is only under such favourable circumstances, that the artist can enter the lists with nature; and, having but a flat surface to work upon, he is warranted in availing himself of every assistance science can afford. In arranging objects scientifically, to give them at the same time the appearance of natural accident is one of the perfections of the art.

As the best practical hints are derived from accidental combinations in nature, whose sudden changes prevent the possibility of sketching, the mind ought to be trained to the most regular and even mechanical mode of arranging the ideas; that in an instant we may be able to determine whether the effects, which we perceive, depend upon a particular form, upon particular arrangement of the light and shade, or upon the manner in which the hot and cold colours are brought in contact. By thus tracing effects to their proper causes, we secure the principal points as a sort of short hand notes to guide and assist the memory. This practice will also open a road of communication between the eye and the operations of the mind, which neither a hasty sketch nor the most learned dissertation can, separately, produce. At first it may seem more difficult than it really is; but a few trials will convince the student of its practicability, especially as the effects that strike him to be the most pictorial are generally the most simple.

*Fig.* 4. The cards lying on the ground, in this subject, indicate the cause of the quarrel; and the figure entering from an adjoining apartment gives us a hint of the noise generally attending such brawls. As a moral is here introduced, I shall make a few remarks (otherwise irrelevant to the purpose) in this place. When a picture possesses a moral, it is certainly a great advantage, provided we are not disgusted by its vulgarity, as is the case in the representations of drunkenness, &c. in some of the Dutch school, or by affected sentiment, as in many of the present works of all the schools. The moral must also never injure the picture in its higher requisites. In the early ages, representations of vice were necessary as strong lessons of morality; but as mankind grew more enlightened, they were referred to books, not pictures, for improvement. Besides, an artist ought always to recollect, that he paints for the higher, not for the lower classes of men; and as his business is to convey pleasure, not pain, a little intercourse with society will convince him, that men in all ranks have often enough to vex them, or to produce a variance with their fellow creatures, without hanging up on their walls representations tending to increase either the one or the other feeling. The absence of these considerations in an artist (of which we see daily proofs) dooms his works to that neglect which he ascribes to the want of encouragement to the arts generally. Representations of tragical events also (though possessing a fine moral or sentiment) have received but little patronage in this country; whether it is that they are not suited to the character of the nation, who, though not averse to the representation of a tragedy on the stage, are unwilling to choose a constant companion from such a class, or that there are few of those connoisseurs whose feelings are completely absorbed in the contemplation of high art, is a question which this is not the proper place to discuss: the fact is, however, indisputable.

*Plate III. fig.* 6. As this composition consists of a single figure, I shall notice here the method Metzu has taken to render it a part of the whole, especially as we shall have to refer to other plates, when we come to treat of light and shade, and colour. The figure is dressed in black and white

coming in contact, and contrast in the strongest manner; the black is repeated by the hat, and diffused by the black marble in the floor, the white is referred to the white marble in the floor and collected into a mass by the white wall; the carpet which is of red and warm colours, focused at the light by a stick of wax, is repeated by the back of the chair, and carried up by the outside of the window on the edge of the picture, which is painted of a pale red; the forms are echoed and repeated with the same simplicity, and the picture frame on the wall, from being smaller than the frame of the window, serves at the same time to assist the perspective effect: even the fastening of the casement is not without its use in the composition. In thus obliging a design to depend on its ground for support, consists the principle of union and harmony; but, as I have at present only to draw the student's attention to the arrangement of form and that portion of composition that arises from the repetition and connection of lines, I shall notice one good plan amongst many others, which is, to mark in strongly those points in the ground which of necessity must be introduced from natural circumstances, at the same time contriving the group so that those points become of the greatest consequence to the composition. This often gives a characteristic stamp of nature to the whole.

*Fig.* 7. We have here the strong dark point coming in contact with the light ground in the most cutting manner; which is more naturally accounted for by its being the most projecting; as it is the inside of an empty drinking cup, it perhaps indicates the commencement of the story as well as any other means.

*Plate IV. fig.* 1. As an outline can give us little idea of this arrangement, I may be allowed to observe, that the four points of light, are the upper halves of both the figures (being of a pale yellow), the white dog and a light wall above the fireplace brought in contact with a black powder horn.

*Fig.* 2. Ostade's pictures have the peculiarly valuable property of look-

Plate 4.

# Angular Composition

Fig 1.

Terburg

Fig 2.

A Cuyp

Fig 3.

P. De Laer

Fig 4.

Rubens

Fig 5.

Correggio

John Burnet &c.

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter, Lower Brook Street, June 1st 1822.

ing well at a distance, thereby attracting the attention of the spectator towards them. When we come nigh to examine, we find that this is produced by their possessing a decided mass of light, obtained by means of a light wall, sky, &c. His heads and hands form a number of luminous spots in a mass of half tint, and are rendered of more value by the introduction of blue and dark draperies; this requires much consideration, in order that those spots may take agreeable and decided forms to prevent confusion. In Ostade's works it is rendered the more easy, as he has seldom any particular story to interfere with the arrangement. His pictures call to my mind a passage in Hervey, which appears like the language of a painter, so completely consonant is it to the principles on which he constructs his work. Speaking of the stars, Hervey says, "on a careless inspection, you perceive no accuracy or uniformity in the position of the heavenly bodies, they appear like an illustrious chaos, a promiscuous heap of shining globes, neither ranked in order nor moving by line; but what seems confusion is all regularity; what carries a show of negligence is really the result of the most masterly contrivance."

*Fig.* 3. P. De Laer, from his long residence amongst the Italian painters, has constructed most of his pictures, though generally in the low walks of art, on the most regular and severe principles of their grandest compositions. As this regularity is considered by some to be incompatible with the negligence of arrangement which they suppose necessary to the picturesque, I shall here make a few observations on that doctrine. I consider it to be false, and not tenable, when referred to the operations of nature; for we find her conducting and exhibiting the most beautiful appearances and effects in the humblest and most trifling of her works, by the same laws that regulate her in the formation of the most sublime. Abernethy says, "that work is beheld with admiration and delight, as the result of deep counsel, which is complicated in its parts, yet simple in its operations, where a variety of effects are seen to arise from one principle operating uniformly." When we refer to the great masters in poetry, we find that the Idyls of Theocritus are not less regular than the Iliad of

Homer; or the Georgics and Eclogues of Virgil than the Eneid. The English pastorals have failed in giving pleasure, not by the regularity of their construction, but in consequence of their not being founded on truth; the language and scenery not being that of nature in such situations.

Let me here caution the student against supposing that I mean grossness and vulgarity as proper accompaniments in his representations of common nature; he must convey such scenes to us with the appearance of their having passed through a susceptible and amiable mind, anxious to render nature agreeable, not to make her disgusting.

In the works of the best painters in the lower walks of the art, there are numberless examples of this regularity. Even Wouvermans, whose soft and delicate touch seems ill suited to severe regularity of form, or light and shade, has received an advantage by its adoption: his best pictures being founded on the simple construction of his rival. A regular form can always be rendered sufficiently irregular by the means of light and shade; and if P. De Laer's pictures possess this property of light and shade too decidedly for such a purpose, we must recollect that from his painting upon a dark red ground (as was used at the time by many of the Italians) his works often look harsh; the lights, from being thickly painted, having resisted the influence of the ground, while his half tints are absorbed and indented in the shadow.

As the student will have occasion to refer to the prints after the different designs here given, I beg leave to remark, that, in most of the Italian prints which I compared with the original pictures, I found the characteristic points often not attended to. The strong lights wanted their value, either from the shadows being deficient in their proper strength and quietness, or from the introduction of aerial perspective (a circumstance seldom influencing the conduct of the great masters either of the Italian or Venetian schools), or from the manner in which the strong darks and lights were brought in contact. I believe sufficient has already been

Plate 5.

# Circular Composition.

Fig 1.

Raffaelle.

Fig 2.

Correggio.

Fig 3

Guido.

John Burnet & Co.

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter, Lower Brook Street, June 28. 1824.

written on engraving, nor am I against its being considered a liberal translation; the beauty of lines is, perhaps, the only substitute engravers can give for the absence of colours; but surely it is not too much to request, that a strong red, or a strong blue (however ornamented by lines), be referred to its proper scale, either as the extension of light, or the production of shadow. These errors seem to have arisen from contemplating the picture in the twilight, for the more easy detection of the light and shade; a most fallacious method; for, in such case, the most projecting and the most retiring colours are rendered similar.

*Fig.* 5. As in figure 2, we may observe this form influencing the arrangement of the whole group; we have here the heads composed on the same principle, and repeating each other with a simplicity which is safe only in the hands of the best painters. I have mentioned regularity as a quality to be found in the most sublime subjects in painting; but to infer from that, that regularity constituted sublimity, were as absurd as to say, irregularity constituted the picturesque.

## CIRCULAR COMPOSITION.

We come now to speak of the circular form of composition, which is applicable to the highest walks of art from its simplicity and extensive sweep; and to the lowest, from its being finely adapted for the purposes of light and shade.

*Plate V. fig.* 1. In this Cartoon we have a fine specimen of this form of composition. In the design, a strict adherence to the plan laid down has secured a decided character to the picture. With Raffaelle this seems to have been invariably of the first importance; his worst compositions have always a strong feature to recommend them. In this design we have the figures gradually declining from the sides to the centre of the circle on the foreground, which enables the spectator to view the whole of the persons employed: to assist which arrangement, Raffaelle has placed the Apostles

on an elevated plane; and, by placing the principal in the centre, has enabled them to acquire that consequence their diminution would otherwise have deprived them of. The regularity of the composition is also increased by the division of the group into seven figures on each side, and no one, except Ananias and Sapphira, performs an action that is not repeated. Thus simply has Raffaelle contrived not only to tell his story, but also those circumstances which preceded and followed it. This regularity will strike the student as being particularly suited to religious subjects; but a few attempts, to make such uniformity appear a natural emanation, will compel him to exclaim with the poet,

"Within that circle none durst walk but he."

As I shall have occasion to speak of the repetition of form, as being no less essential towards the production of harmony than the repetition of colour, I may call the student's attention to it in this place. In compositions embracing many figures, a repetition of form and action is often found to be indispensable; a single figure, in such case, being found too small to give importance to any action, is referred to the next for assistance; as, in colouring, one colour is often made to depend upon the adjoining for its shadow or enlargement. But, independently of its acquiring a consequence by such extension, harmony requires, that a strong action should be as it were broken down and diffused through the group. In writing, this is generally the case, and the reader is prepared for one sentence by what has preceded it. This simplicity and harmonious communication is to be found in nature, in the antique, in the best Italian masters, and in many of the Dutch, particularly Ostade. It is seldom to be met with in the French school, which is fond of sudden contrast, and insulated action, light, and colour.

*Fig.* 2. In compositions of out-of-door scenes, this circular form of arrangement is often the only opportunity we have of procuring a mass of shade so necessary to the group in a pictorial point of view. I am aware

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Plate 6

# Circular Composition

Fig 1.

Rubens

Fig 2

B. West.

Fig 3

Rembrandt

Fig 4

Domenichino

Fig 5

Raffaelle

John Burnet Sc.

London, Published by W.H. Carpenter, Lower Brook Street, June 1st 1822

that some *sculptors* consider the arrangement of their figures degraded by any attention to the picturesque effect of light and shade, which to *painters* seems more extraordinary, as sculptors have not the means of local colour to produce it. With sculpture, however, it is not our province to interfere; I shall only observe that such reasoning never seems to have influenced Coreggio. The most picturesque arrangements in form, and in light and shade, are to be found in his grandest compositions. We have here six heads placed in the most unequal manner, numerically speaking; the shadow is increased by the dark blue dress of the Virgin, and the two most projecting points by the light drapery of the Magdalen and the strong red of St. Jerome; yet this picture is not less sublime than that of "the Doctors of the Church" (*Fig.* 3), where the six heads are placed in the most regular manner; four round the altar, and one at each side, for the purpose of connecting the lower and upper half of the picture; the consultation of the doctors, and the vision expressive of the subject of their research. The prominent points in this work are the same as in *fig.* 2, the figure with the book being in a strong red, and the other in white.

*Plate VI. fig.* 1. In this subject Rubens displays all the easy fluency of a great master, who would consider such a design only as an amusement. The manner in which the figures are interwoven with each other, the mode resorted to, to assist the projecting and retiring points, and the velocity with which the whole appears to move, are all worthy of the artist's attention.

*Fig.* 2. The student may compare this admirable design of West's, "The Death of General Wolfe," with figure 4, "The Death of St. Jerome:" as Dominichino has adopted the same means to produce his mass of shadow in the middle of the group, and to bring it in contact with the light on the principal figure.

*Fig.* 3. As I shall have occasion to refer to the examples of this great master of light and shade in their proper place, it would be unfair to make

any observations on him here, where he appears, as Milton would express it, "shorn of his beams." I may, however, remark, that, from his making use of mean materials, he often destroys the beauty of that structure which the splendour of his light is so well calculated to adorn.

*Fig.* 5. As the merits of this composition have been descanted on by every critic,—being a subject well suited for a display of the powers of eloquence,—I shall merely offer one or two practical remarks. Raffaelle has made the principal figure of the lower group (an interesting young female) detach itself from the ground by a strong warm light cutting against the shadow, and by a dark blue mantle coming in contact with the light; by her addressing the Apostles and pointing to the demoniac, the two sides are united, and the figures are so linked together that the eye is carried round until we arrive at the most projecting points, the hands and feet of the Apostle with the book. The Disciples express their inability to perform the cure, and, by two of them pointing to the mount, refer the people to Christ, who has retired thither to pray. This is the arrangement, but it was not alone by the expression or arrangement of his figures that Raffaelle holds his rank in the art; it was also by the bold and original conception of his subject. He has here displayed the vision of the Transfiguration in the most sublime manner, and by raising his figures from the ground (one of those movements of the mind which are above restraint) has stamped them with the strong feature of immortal beings. Mr. Fuseli luminously describes them rising like "a flame:" (if not too metaphorical) he might have said, "like a bright flame issuing as if from a sacrifice, and ascending unto God."

*Plate VII.* It is not only necessary that a group should have hollows for the reception of shadow, but also projections for the light to rest upon; it not only ought to possess a good general form in the outline which defines it, but the figures must also be linked together in such a way as to lead the spectator in amongst them. They must appear to have room to stand upon, and every figure must keep his place in its relative

Plate 7.

Fig 1.

Raffaello.

Fig 2.

Rembrandt.

John Burnet sc.

London, Published by W.H. Carpenter, Lower Brook Street, June 1st 1829.

Plate 8.

Fig 1.

B. West.

Fig 2

Jn.º Barnet.

Fig 3.

Jn.º Barnet.

John Barnet, &c.

London, Published by W.H. Carpenter Lower Brook Street June 1.st 1822.

distance from the eye: hence a form composed of a concave and convex line has been often adopted as the simplest and best, and possessing the greatest variety of advantages. That it is so generally used will cease to surprize us, when we find it applicable both to the regularity of Raffaelle and the irregularity of Rembrandt.

*Plate VIII. fig.* 1. In this design, "The Landing of Charles II," West has placed the principal figure in the middle of the picture. Commencing his composition at the nighest point, he carries on his group until it ends in the distance. Neither in the situation of the hero, nor in the form of the group, does he seem solicitous to hide the science. He has brought the nigh point in contact with the shadow, and strengthened it by the female whom the boy accompanies, being dressed in strong dark: when this is brought sharp off the ground, as is the case also in *fig.* 2, it enables us to keep the other figures in their places better than by diminishing the firmness of their shadows or colours.

*Fig.* 2. "Cattle returning home in a shower." In this composition the principal light falls on the convex part of the group, and the depth of the shadow is assisted by the local colour of the objects placed in it. The goat in the foreground is connected to the rest by some white flowers of an elder bush, which cannot be expressed in an outline. As this is from a design of my late brother's, I cannot allow this opportunity to pass without expressing the great loss I feel in not having his assistance, not only in these notes, but in every thing connected with the art: though practising painting but for a short time of a short life, his strength of mind, his fine eye for colour, and a taste for the beauties of pastoral painting, convince me the English School has lost one that would have been an ornament to that department of the science.

*Fig.* 3. Is a repetition of the same form.

*Plate IX.* This plate consists of Wilkie's admirable composition of

the Blind Fiddler, the Salutation of the Virgin by Rembrandt, and a Dance by Ostade. I shall leave it to the student's own judgment to investigate the various forms on which these compositions depend.

By making the principal heads depend upon one mode of arrangement, the general appearance of the group on a different mode, the background on a third, and so on with the minor points (provided they all tend to the assistance of one another), his composition will not only have intricacy without confusion, but that variety which is so characteristic in nature. A beautiful combination in nature will often appear to evade every rule, by her being perfect in every mode of examination. All her varieties emanate from a strait line and a curve. A judicious arrangement of objects possessing these various forms, gives the strongest natural appearance to a picture; nor ought the artist to leave out rashly what he may conceive to be void of beauty. In colouring, harsh tints are admitted to produce harmony in the other colours; and the most picturesque arrangements often depend on the presence of what might be otherwise considered ugly forms.

As I have made use of the terms "beautiful and agreeable arrangements," it is proper to give an explanation of the sense in which they are applied. By a beautiful arrangement, I mean a proper adaptation of those principles that arrest a common observer, and give a pleasurable sensation, which to a cultivated mind increases (not diminishes) by the investigation of the cause which produces it. For example, a beautiful appearance in nature affects the savage and the philosopher from their sensations merely as men; but a painter, whose life is spent in a constant competition with nature in producing the same effects, receives a tenfold gratification in following her through those assemblages which to the world beside are, as it were, "a fountain sealed and a book shut up." Hence, in art, a beautiful arrangement must be a selection of those forms, lights, and colours that produce a similar result; and the taste of an artist is shown, in heightening their effect by the absence of those circumstances which are found by experience to produce the contrary. Did an investigation of the means

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Plate 9

Fig 1.

D. Wilkie.

Fig 2.

Rembrandt.

Fig 3.

John Burnet, Sc.

London, Published by W. H. Carpenter Lower Brook Street, June 1st 1832.

pursued by the great masters tend to abridge an artist's pleasurable sensations, instead of being the most favoured, he would be rendered the most miserable of beings; but the opposite is the case, as by such means he is taught an alphabet that enables him to understand the language of nature. It may be supposed, that in my search after so desirable an object, I have perused all the works written to define Beauty and Taste, and which endeavour to circumscribe with a line that endless variety and omnipresence which make nature a source of gratification to all nations under every alteration of the mind; but as I wish to avoid all controversy on the subject, which we often find merely renders the most sublime truths more obscure, I shall only remark, that, as far as painting is concerned, the authors of many of these works have done an irreparable injury. Artists generally prefer the opinions of untutored children to the remarks of the most learned philosophers, whose advancement in other sciences really seems to increase their ignorance of this. If I have explained my definition of the terms sufficiently for the artist's comprehension, I am satisfied. To explain them to others would be equally impossible as that those others should be able to define them to us. The mind must have received its education through the medium of the eye, not of the ear, to enjoy the faculty of conceiving such ideas, or the power of tracing them to their original source in nature, or in art, as a test of their truth.

Before I conclude, I have to apologize for the paucity and brevity of these observations, and beg the reader's constant reference to the plates, as the only method of making myself correctly understood. Painting is a practical branch of philosophy, and can only be rendered clear by satisfying the observations of the eye, as well as the reflections of the mind; this, perhaps, is one reason why so much has been written on the subject without those truths being made sufficiently obvious, which the writers wished to demonstrate.

I have also been anxious to avoid tautology, as it will be necessary to go over, in a great measure, the same ground, when I come to treat of light

and shade, and colour; when many observations which appear to be omitted here will present themselves, from belonging more properly to those divisions of the work.

I must also caution the young artist against supposing that these modes of arrangement are given for his imitation; I merely wish him to be acquainted with the advantages any particular composition possesses, that in adopting any invention of his own, he may engraft upon it those or similar advantages. A design that has nothing but novelty to recommend it, is a conceit, not a composition. The student in painting can hope to derive advantage from theory only, when rendered obvious by ocular demonstration. One great cause of the obscurity which envelopes the art, is the criticism of those whose ideas on the subject are obscure;—to free *the world* from their influence is perhaps impossible; but the artist must free *himself*.

FINIS.

C. Whittingham, College House, Chiswick.

# PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

# LIGHT AND SHADE IN PAINTING.

C. and C. Whittingham, Chiswick.

# PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

# LIGHT AND SHADE IN PAINTING.

ILLUSTRATED BY

Examples from the Italian, Flemish, and Dutch Schools.

---

BY JOHN BURNET.

---

" The highest finishing is labour in vain, unless at the same time there be preserved a breadth of light and shadow."

REYNOLDS'S NOTES ON FRESNOY.

S. C. 9.

LONDON:

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OLD BOND STREET.

1826.

# PREFACE.

I AM now induced to take up the second part of the PRACTICAL HINTS ON PAINTING, from the encouragement the first has met with; but more especially from the approbation of many of our best painters, who are undoubtedly the best judges of the utility of the work. In this part, treating of the conduct of the light and shade, I shall follow the same mode as before, merely throwing out hints as they occur, without any relation to connection, or a regular treatise. The mind is naturally fond of variety, and by leading it through a succession of images, provided their advantages are shown or explained, the end of instruction is accomplished. There is no fixed mode for conveying instruction; those things which appear to the reader to be useful, he will connect in his own mind by a chain of reasoning, shorter than the shortest which could be furnished by writing; and the longest

dissertation to prove the existence or utility of that which appears of no advantage would be unavailing.

I have endeavoured to trace the effects, as much as possible, to their first causes operating in various ways on the minds of the different artists who have adopted them. Whether they were guided by rules, or imitative instinct, we cannot now determine; nor is it my wish to inculcate any doctrine where the student has a better mode of his own to serve as a guide. Let him, however, always bear in mind, that in painting, as in other things, to use the words of Dr. Johnson, "The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance which combined them, but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase nor suffers decay."

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# PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

# LIGHT AND SHADE IN PAINTING.

## LIGHT AND SHADE.

Before proceeding to investigate light and shade in their various intricate situations, it may be proper to notice a few of the more palpable and self-evident combinations, and for the better comprehending of which, I shall divide them into five parts: *viz.* light, half light, middle tint, half dark, and dark. When a picture is chiefly composed of light and half light, the darks will have more force and point; but, without the help of strong colour to give it solidity, it will be apt to look feeble: and when a picture is composed mainly of dark and half dark, the lights will be more brilliant; but they will be apt to look spotty for want of half light to spread and connect them; and the piece be in danger of becoming black and heavy:

and when a picture is composed chiefly of middle tint, the dark and light portions have a more equal chance of coming into notice; but the general effect is in danger of being common and insipid.

Light and shade are capable of producing many results; but, the three principal are relief, harmony, and breadth. By the first the Artist is enabled to give his works the distinctness and solidity of nature. The second is the result of a union and consent of one part with another; and the third, a general breadth, is the necessary attendant on extent and magnitude. A judicious management of these three properties is to be found in the best pictures of the Italian, Venetian, and Flemish Schools, and ought to employ the most attentive examination of the student; for by giving too much relief, he will produce a dry hard effect; by too much softness and blending of the parts, woolliness and insipidity; and in a desire to preserve a breadth of effect, he may produce flatness.

Relief is most necessary in large works; as their being seen from a greater distance than easel pictures prevents their looking harsh or cutting, and gives them that sharpness and clearness of effect so necessary to counteract heaviness. Not only the works of Raphael and those of the Italian school possess this quality, but we find it in the greatest perfection in the pictures of Paul Veronese and Tintoret; and even the larger works of Titian and Corregio have a flatness and precision which we look for in vain in the succeeding school of Caracci and their disciples; Guido excepted.

Harmony or a union of the different parts of a composition depends upon the intermediate parts serving as a link or chain, either by conveying

a sensation of the same colours with those in immediate contact, or by neutralizing and breaking down the harsh asperities of the two extremes, and thus producing a connexion or agreement.

Breadth of effect is only to be produced by a great extent of light or shade pervading the picture. If an open daylight appearance is intended, such as we see in Cuyp, &c. it will be best produced by leaving out part of the middle tint, and allowing a greater spread of light and half light; this will also give the darks the relative force which they possess in nature. If a breadth of shadow is required, such as we find in Rembrandt, &c. the picture ought to be made up of middle tint and half dark. In the one treatment the darks ought to tell sharp and cutting, which is the characteristic of strong daylight; in the other the lights ought to appear powerful and brilliant, enveloped in masses of obscurity.

The influence of shadow upon any composition, when carried beyond the necessary depth for the relief or distinct marking of the several parts, is breadth, from its absorbing many of the half tints and rendering the darks less cutting; and repose, from there being fewer of the outlines visible; hence arises a certain grandeur attendant upon space, and an agreeable sensation, from the spectator being allowed to exercise his own fancy in embodying indistinct forms. Thus the gloomy solitude of a wood is increased by the absence of the twittering light through the trees, the absence of their harsh colour, and the distinct form and crisp marking of the leaves. Rembrandt has carried this property of shadow beyond the hope of any improvement, and by this means has clothed the most trifling subject with a portion of sublimity. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by the association of ideas, it is capable of imparting a greater degree of

horror to any subject of terror; as imaginary dangers appear greater than real, being augmented by the operations of the mind. Milton has made use of this quality in describing the situation of the fallen Angels:

"From those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe."

And Titian, in his picture of the Martyrdom of St. Laurence, which otherwise is disagreeable from its being cold and black.

Having thus defined some of the characteristic features of shadow, the effects of light in a great measure explain themselves, being in most instances of an opposite nature. Its cheerful influence operates on the mind of the spectator, either when viewing the festivities of a village holiday or when he beholds it diffused over the general face of nature: it may be termed the Allegro in Painting.

## Explanation of Plate I. Fig. 1.

If light, collected into a focus by means of a lens, be thrown obliquely upon a wall, it will explain to us one of its principal properties, upon which many Artists have founded their principles of light and shade. Where the bundles of rays are collected, the light is increased in brightness; and when they become more diffused and spread out, it naturally becomes more feeble, losing itself in half tint. In this example we have some of the most essential qualities of light as applicable to the purposes of painting. We have a principal light, which, being produced by the

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Plate 1

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Fig. 7.

collecting of the rays, leaves that portion of the ground the darkest which comes in contact with it, thereby assisting its brightness. We have an innumerable variety of gradations, until the light is dissipated and lost. Some artists maintain, and justly, that every light, however small, ought to have a focus, or one part brighter than another; and as we find this to be a general law in nature, it is surely safe ground to go upon. For the same reason we ought to have one portion of a dark more decided than the rest. If these two extremes are brought in contact, we make them assist each other, one becoming brighter, and the other darker, from the effect of contrast. If they are placed at the opposite sides of the picture, we have greater breadth and a more equal balance. Let us now examine how these properties have been made use of in the management of the light and shade of a picture. If, for example, we take a head by Rembrandt, we find the principal light or focus in the upper part of the face (which he often, to render more luminous, surrounds with a black bonnet or hat, and even this he keeps of a cold tone, to give more value to the flesh); the light is then allowed to fall down on the figure, producing thereby a union and an appearance of his light giving out rays of the same hue as itself. If we follow him in the conduct of some of his larger compositions, we find the same principle adopted, whether they consist of many figures, such as the hundred Guilder print, or of few, as in the small Nativity in the National Gallery; thus rendering the most complicated compositions subservient to the simplest principles of light and shade. A few experiments on a ground of a middle tint, with a pencil filled with white, and another dipped in black, will give the student an insight into all the changes capable of being produced upon this principle.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 2.

If a diagonal line be drawn through the picture, and the extreme dark and extreme light be placed at opposite sides, we must of necessity have the greatest breadth of effect. If a balance or union between the two sides be wished, there is no other way but by borrowing a portion of the one and exchanging it for a portion of the opposite; and not only may this practice be made use of for the harmony of the whole, but the light and the shade will be thus rendered more intense by the force of opposition. Now, whether the dark which is carried to the light side be very small, or very large, and, vice versa, we have the groundwork of some of the most powerful and most natural effects in painting. If the light is placed near the horizon, as in evening skies, for example, such as it frequently is in Cuyp, we see it rising upwards until lost in middle tint in the upper part of the picture, and the middle tint descending into shadow by means of trees, figures, &c. thus making a sweep round the picture, and thereby affording the greatest opportunity for breadth of effect. If the two extreme points are connected by intermediate figures, so as to form but one group, we have the greatest firmness, as the light part of the group will be relieved by a dark ground, and the dark part of the group by a light ground: if we pursue the contrary practice, and place the dark part of the group on the dark ground, and the light part of the group on the light ground, we have more breadth and softness of effect. There is no want of examples, either in nature or in pictures, to warrant our following either mode.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 3.

Sometimes we find the principal light in the centre of the picture gradating to the extremities with a border of dark binding in the whole. By this mode the light has great brilliancy, especially if a small portion of dark is brought in contact with it. This melting of the light into shadow has been carried to great perfection by Corregio and Rembrandt, who most frequently relieved the dark side of their figures by a still darker background, which Reynolds (who has adopted this mode in so many of his works) mentions as giving a rich effect.

If this method is pursued in the management of the light on a hand, or a single head, it is equally applicable, as in a more extensive work. In the landscapes of Claude, who has often placed the sun near the centre of his compositions, we find the light managed upon the same broad principle, gradating to the sides of his canvass by means of buildings, ships, &c. with often a clump of dark trees jutting into the mass of light, thereby giving it its brilliant character, and serving at the same time to convey the dark sides into the picture. If he reminds us occasionally of Rembrandt, it arises from his great breadth of effect; if of Corregio, it is the soft union of his lights with the shadow. A few walks in the evening in the twilight, and at night in scenery where nature has an opportunity of showing her various effects, will put the student in possession of a power to unravel all her mysteries. We do not know whether Claude, Corregio, and Rembrandt, were acquainted with the works of one another, but we have the most evident proofs that they were well acquainted with

the principle by which nature produces her most striking effects; and a breadth of light and shade, soft and subdued tones of colour, and every requisite for forming the mind of an artist, is still to be found in the same school in which they studied.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 4.

If the lights are to predominate in a picture from the ground being low in tone, it is of the utmost consequence that they should not only be varied in form and magnitude, but that they should produce an agreeable arrangement in the picture, seeing that they will attract greater notice than when the ground is lighter.

I shall here take the liberty of introducing a passage from Reynolds's works, as nothing can exceed it in utility and justness of observation. In his notes upon Fresnoy, speaking of light and shade, he says, "The same rules, which have been given in regard to the regulation of groups of figures, must be observed in regard to the grouping of lights; that there shall be a superiority of one over the rest, that they shall be separated and varied in their shapes, and that there should be at least three lights: the secondary lights ought, for the sake of harmony and union, to be of nearly equal brightness, though not of equal magnitude with the principal."

The Dutch painters particularly excelled in the management of light and shade, and have shown, in this department, that consummate skill which entirely conceals the appearance of art.

"Jan Steen, Teniers, Ostade, Du Sart, and many others of that school may be produced as instances, and recommended to the young artist's careful study and attention.

"The means by which the painter works, and on which the effect of his picture depends, are light and shade, and warm and cold colours. That there is an art in the management and disposition of those means will be easily granted, and it is equally certain, that this art is to be acquired by a careful examination of the works of those who have excelled in it.

"I shall here set down the result of the observations which I have made on the works of those artists who appear to have best understood the management of light and shade, and who may be considered as examples for imitation in this branch of art.

"Titian, Paul Veronese, and Tintoret were among the first painters who reduced to a system what was before practised without any fixed principle, and consequently neglected occasionally. From the Venetian painters Rubens extracted his scheme of composition, which was soon understood and adopted by his countrymen, and extended even to the minor painters of familiar life in the Dutch school.

"When I was at Venice, the method I took to avail myself of their principles was this: when I observed an extraordinary effect of light and shade in any picture, I took a leaf of my pocket-book, and darkened every part of it in the same gradation of light and shade as the picture, leaving the white paper untouched to represent light, and this without any attention to the subject or to the drawing of the figures. A few trials of

this kind will be sufficient to give the method of their conduct in the management of their lights. After a few experiments I found the paper blotted nearly alike: their general practice appeared to be, to allow not above a quarter of the picture for the light, including in this portion both the principal and secondary lights; another quarter to be as dark as possible; and the remaining half kept in mezzotint or half shadow.

"Rubens appears to have admitted rather more light than a quarter, and Rembrandt much less, scarce an eighth; by this conduct Rembrandt's light is extremely brilliant, but it costs too much; the rest of the picture is sacrificed to this one object. That light will certainly appear the brightest which is surrounded with the greatest quantity of shade, supposing equal skill in the artist.

"By this means you may likewise remark the various forms and shapes of those lights, as well as the objects on which they are flung; whether a figure, or the sky, a white napkin, animals, or utensils, often introduced for this purpose only. It may be observed, likewise, what portion is strongly relieved, and how much is united with its ground; for it is necessary that some part (though a small one is sufficient) should be sharp and cutting against its ground, whether it be light on a dark or dark on a light ground, in order to give firmness and distinctness to the work; if, on the other hand, it is relieved on every side, it will appear as if inlaid on its ground. Such a blotted paper, held at a distance from the eye, will strike the spectator as something excellent for the disposition of light and shadow, though he does not distinguish whether it is a history, a portrait, a landscape, dead game, or any thing else; for the same principles extend to every branch of the art.

"Whether I have given an exact account, or made a just division of the quantity of light admitted into the works of those painters, is of no very great consequence; let every person examine and judge for himself: it will be sufficient if I have suggested a mode of examining pictures this way, and one means at least of acquiring the principles on which they wrought."

This is so admirable as to need no comment, and ought never to be lost sight of, as upon the management of light and shade depends the general look of the picture.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 5.

As a wall or flat surface recedes from the light, it necessarily becomes darker, and as the outline is more or less defined, it has the property of advancing or receding. These may seem to be properties too evident to every one to need any explanation; but, when we see a foreground, in place of coming flat up to the edge of the frame, appear to slope down like a declivity, we must either suppose that the painter knew not the principle of assisting the perspective by means of light and shade, or had not the faculty of seeing nature. When we consider that nature spreads out her landscape upon a horizontal plane, and that we have to compete with her upon an upright surface, we shall find we have not only to call into our aid strong light, coming in contact with sharp dark, warm colours, and such as have the property of advancing, but to subdue the more distant part of the ground by soft shadow and retiring cool tints.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 6.

When the composition is kept dark, forming a mass of shadow in the centre of the canvass, the light is often conducted round it by means of the sky, water, or light foreground; and as the dark becomes in a manner isolated, it receives great vigour and importance. As this is the reverse of Fig. 3, we find the same simple broad principle predominant, and whether it be composed of a clump of trees, or the dark dress of a whole-length figure, we find the management guided by the same rules; only if a portrait, the circumstance of the face coming light off the background requires the feet or base of the figure to tell dark on the ground, for the sake of firmness; and if any part is more lost in the background than another, it perhaps ought to be the middle portion of the figure. If a clump of trees such as we often find in Claude is to be represented, their stems shoot out from a ground of the same darkness, thereby producing a union of the trees with the shadow which they cast on the ground. As a light in the centre of dark tints must thereby acquire an increased consequence, so a dark in the middle of light tints receives the same importance.

*Plate* I. *Fig.* 7.

I have noticed in another place the union of one part of the picture with another, by means of a repetition of the light: it will therefore be unnecessary to say any thing further upon such management. I may however observe that it is not only of service to repeat the light, but, also, that it should be of the same colour; accordingly we observe in Cuyp, whose principal light is often yellow, that it is carried into the dark part of the picture by means of yellow drapery, a cow, sheep, or a few touches of golden colour, according as he wishes such extension of his light large or small. If the principal light is cold, such as blue and white, we find it repeated either by a reflection in water, or a figure dressed in the same cool tint. Portrait painters generally make use of the light in the sky to repeat the lights of their head and hands, by making it of the same colour.

Homer; or the Georgics and Eclogues of Virgil than the Eneid. The English pastorals have failed in giving pleasure, not by the regularity of their construction, but in consequence of their not being founded on truth; the language and scenery not being that of nature in such situations.

Let me here caution the student against supposing that I mean grossness and vulgarity as proper accompaniments in his representations of common nature; he must convey such scenes to us with the appearance of their having passed through a susceptible and amiable mind, anxious to render nature agreeable, not to make her disgusting.

In the works of the best painters in the lower walks of the art, there are numberless examples of this regularity. Even Wouvermans, whose soft and delicate touch seems ill suited to severe regularity of form, or light and shade, has received an advantage by its adoption: his best pictures being founded on the simple construction of his rival. A regular form can always be rendered sufficiently irregular by the means of light and shade; and if P. De Laer's pictures possess this property of light and shade too decidedly for such a purpose, we must recollect that from his painting upon a dark red ground (as was used at the time by many of the Italians) his works often look harsh; the lights, from being thickly painted, having resisted the influence of the ground, while his half tints are absorbed and indented in the shadow.

As the student will have occasion to refer to the prints after the different designs here given, I beg leave to remark, that, in most of the Italian prints which I compared with the original pictures, I found the characteristic points often not attended to. The strong lights wanted their value, either from the shadows being deficient in their proper strength and quietness, or from the introduction of aerial perspective (a circumstance seldom influencing the conduct of the great masters either of the Italian or Venetian schools), or from the manner in which the strong darks and lights were brought in contact. I believe sufficient has already been

Fig 1.

Rembrandt.

Fig 2.

Rembrandt.

London Published July 1st 1826.

which, as in nature, reflects back the rays, and illuminates the surrounding objects, giving thus his principal light the properties of light itself. The shadows of all objects receiving such direct rays, we sometimes see strongly defined, as is the case in nature, and indeed we often find Rembrandt placing objects for the express purpose of producing such shadows, which gives an appearance of truth to the whole effect; at other times we find the shadows swallowed up in the splendour of the light, as if afraid of disturbing its breadth. Sometimes we find his strong light, his strong dark, and his hot and cold colours, all focused at one point; and at other times his darks employed to clear up the middle tint, and his strongest colours made the means of uniting his light with the shade. In short, whatever was his practice, he seems always to have had some end to accomplish, and when we find him departing from what would be the effect in nature under such circumstances, we may rest assured that such departure did not arise from ignorance. We often see the attempts of de Hooge and others at representing light confined to its effect in the sky or on the objects out of doors, while it is but sparingly admitted on the figures seen within the apartment; on the contrary, Rembrant's figures are lighted up with a splendour which extinguishes every other subordinate light, and which we often cannot account for upon the common principles of nature.

The subject below in Plate II. is from a picture in the Louvre, and shows how small a portion of light sometimes engaged Rembrandt's solicitude. He has employed the edge of the frame work, the dark under the cradle, and the dark dress of the figure to give it its value. The curtain is a dull red, and is carried into the picture by the dress of the child being of the same colour.

## Plate III. Fig. 1, and 2.

Fig. 1 and 2 represent the "Taking down from the cross" and the "Presentation in the temple." Daulby, in his catalogue, mentions two states of the original etchings more worked upon; but I find, on examination, they are merely the plates left without being much wiped, thereby casting a stain over the whole, except a high light on the cap of the figure holding the crosier, and a light at the torch in the "Taking down from the cross," the copper being made clean at those places. In many of the varieties of Rembrandt's etchings he has got credit for effects supposed to be produced by much labour, which were the result of the printing alone. In the descent from the cross he has kept the principal light in the upper part of the picture in contact with the strong dark; in the other it is kept below, and is carried upwards by a chain of communication to the head of the crosier. Where the light is at one side, or low down in the picture, such as in the "Wise Men's offering," in the king's collection, there is greater space for a breadth of shadow, than when the light is kept in the centre, as was the principle of most of his first works. In some of his designs he seems to have allowed the entire half of his canvass for repose, and to have confined his composition with all its lights, and darks, and colours, to the other half. Very little often serves to connect the two.

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Fig. 1.

Rembrandt.

Fig. 2.

Rembrandt.

Fig. 3.

Vandyke.

Fig. 4.

Metzu.

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The dark manner of Rembrandt has advantages over every other, if kept within due bounds, as it enables the painter to give a rich tone to his colours without their appearing heavy, which more feeble backgrounds would not admit of, unless the colours are to stand as darks instead of lights; accordingly we find Titian, Tintoret, Giorgione, Rembrandt, and our own Reynolds, all swayed by the same opinion.

## *Plate* III. *Fig.* 3.

When the light part of the composition is placed upon the dark side of the background, and the dark part upon the light side, greater firmness and solidity are produced, and a more equal balance is kept up. The contrary method has more breadth and softness of effect, but unless the light part is of a different hue from the light ground upon which it may be placed, and the dark part is of a warmer or colder tone than the shadow which surrounds it, there is a danger of their losing their substance and becoming flat. Vandyke, in this composition, has made the colours of his figures assist his arrangement of light and shade; the white dress of the child and the yellow dress of the queen make the principal light; the white is repeated by the cap, ruff, &c. of the other figures; the yellow is carried across by the embroidery upon the king's dress, and spread out upon the under part of the sky; the darks are

made up of the dark dress of the king and the child's dress, which is a dull green; the latter tint is carried across the picture by part of the curtain turned up, of the same colour; the curtain itself is a dull yellow and brown, serving as a ground to the queen's dress; the red cloth of the table is repeated by the two chairs; the floor being a dark neutral tint gives a firmness to the bottom of both the figures. If the student, in examining the light and shade of a picture, remarks what colours are resorted to for such purpose, in a few trials he will find that which at first appears complicated and difficult to unravel will become easy and beneficial, serving to strengthen his powers of reflection in the highest degree.

## *Plate* III. *Fig.* 4.

The dark forming the greatest mass of shadow of the picture is often, before being brought in contact with the extreme light, increased and collected to a point by some object whose local colour conduces to such purpose, as in the example here given; where the black dress of the female is brought, at its darkest portion, in contact with the lightest portion of the white dress. This serves to give air to the deepest shades of the background, and greater firmness to the object so relieved. The collecting to one head of all the light, and all the dark of a piece, gives the artist the greatest force of the palette. To enable the other side of the picture to keep up with so much vigour, Metzu has thrown his strong colour into the scale, and brought his red and blue in contact, by a glove lying upon the chair, at the point nearest the eye. The warm colour is taken to the other side by a dog, &c. and the white of the female repeated by a handkerchief the man holds in his hand, his neckcloth, &c.

## Plate IV. Fig. 1.

In a single head we often have but one light; it is therefore necessary to get it to harmonize with the shadow, either in the background or upon the dress. Rembrandt, accordingly, frequently painted the light of the dress of the same colour as the shadow side of the face; thereby keeping up a union and simplicity. In Fig. 2 we have the hands making a second light; and in Fig. 3 we have three spots of light, the shirt and ruffles of both hands: this is the Titian Reynolds thus mentions in the description of the Dusseldorf gallery, and which is now in Munich: "A portrait of a gentleman, by Titian, a kitcat; one hand a-kimbo, the hand itself not seen, only a bit of the ruffle; the other, the left, rests on what appears to be his sword; he is looking off. This portrait has a very pleasing countenance, but is not painted with much facility, nor is it at all mannered; the shadows are of no colour; the drapery being black, and the ground being very near as dark as it, prevents the arm a-kimbo from having a bad effect. It is no small part of our art to know what to bring forward in the light, and what to throw into shade."

The linen in this picture, and most others of Titian, is light and cutting, the flesh forming the half light. Reynolds, talking of the Descent from the Cross, by Rubens, says, "he well knew what effect white linen, opposed to flesh, must have, with his powers of colouring; and the truth is, that none but great colourists can venture to paint pure white linen near flesh; but such know the advantage of it." In Rembrandt we generally find the same treatment; although I have often observed the linen kept

Fig 1.

Rembrandt.

Fig 2.

Rembrandt.

Fig 3.

Titian.

Fig 4.

Vandyke.

Fig 5.

Vandyke.

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cool when near the face. To give the flesh a luminous character, he often introduces cool tints coming near it, and when he can find nothing else, uses the shadows of linen for such purpose. In Vandyke's early Italian manner we find the linen much brighter than in his later works, where it became more of a leaden cast.

*Plate* IV. *Fig.* 4, *and* 5.

We sometimes find the light of the sky introduced for the purpose of repeating the lights of the heads and hands, as in Fig. 3; sometimes to spread and enlarge the lights of the head, and give it more consequence, as in Fig. 4. To assist the hand in keeping its situation in this picture, he has defined it by the hat and shadow on the chair. As it is of the utmost consequence that every object should keep its relative distance with regard to the eye of the spectator, it is a good method to define those parts we wish to advance by a dark shadow coming in contact with them, and to surround the retiring portions with a ground of a less opposing character; as we know lines strongly and sharply defined will approach, and those of a softer nature will retire. Such blots are afterwards to be accounted for by the contrivance of the artist: in this consists the application of the background to the figures, one of the most difficult and essential portions of the art.

As light and shade determine the concavities or convexities of all objects, without them the most intelligent outline would be but as a map

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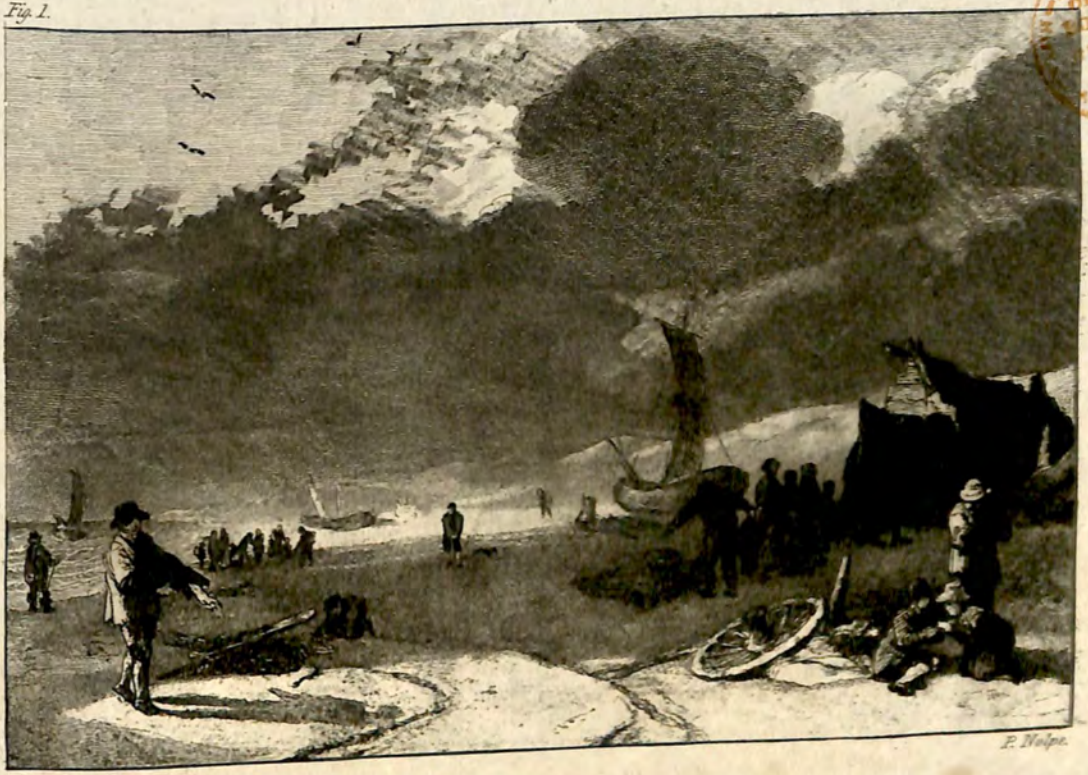
or flat surface. If, for example, we take a cup and examine the influence of light and shade upon it, we find in nature those principles which artists have applied to many purposes in painting. We perceive the near edge strongly defined by the light side coming in contact with the shadow, which becomes darker as it descends into the cup; we have the dark side brought firmly off the light, thus giving it the simplest and most effective means of a true representation of its character. This may appear too evident to notice in a work of this nature, which does not profess to give the mere rudiments of the art; but I am convinced that the most intricate principles of painting emanate from very few sources, and that these sources are of a very simple nature. Every thing within our view is filled with examples, and the mind of the student requires only to be directed to an examination, and investigation of the subject, before commencing any work, or while in the progress. He must not only know what is his intention, but must be in possession of the best method of expressing such intention.

### Plate V. Fig. 1.

When a shadow is carried through the middle of the picture, we have not only an opportunity of giving a breadth of effect; but, the receding portion of the sky, and perspective of the ground, are assisted by their sharpnesses being swallowed up in repose: see this principle noticed at Fig. 5. Plate I.

Fig. 1.



P. Wolpe.

Fig. 2.

G. Dow.

Fig. 3.

Correggio

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## *Plate* V. *Fig.* 2, *and* 3.

When the principal light is kept at one side, we have an opportunity of introducing a larger portion of shadow, than when the light is in the centre, which is often of the first consequence, especially if repose is required in the work.

When, as in Fig. 2, a multitude of small objects are introduced into a picture, or when the general arrangement consists of many figures, it is impossible to get a breadth of light and shade, unless many of them are united together of the same strength, so as to form a mass of light, or of dark; but which to do with skill is one of the greatest difficulties; for unless the science is in some measure concealed, it is no longer science. In the confusion of a battle, for example, it is unlikely that two or three white horses should be collected, so as to form a mass of light; and yet we see in Salvator Rosa, and Wouvermans this method adopted; or in a representation of dead game it is equally improbable that we should always find a swan for the same purpose, as in Weeninx. To obviate such apparent artifice of the painter, we find P. Veronese, Tintoret, and others, making use of the sky, or light buildings, for a principal mass in their large works, consisting of many figures. In the small works of the Dutch school we find the light upon a wall, or on the ground, or in a window, in indoor subjects, and the sky, &c. in open daylight, made use of for this purpose.

Gerard Douw, notwithstanding his extreme finish, contrived to preserve that breadth of light and shade, which his instruction in the school of Rembrandt had empowered him to do; and in small works this breadth of effect is the more difficult to retain, seeing, that there is so little space for the middle tints, darks, lights, and reflected lights, to be observed in nature, and withal, for a certain bluntness in the outline, to prevent the several objects from looking like small models. Reynolds, in his notes to Fresnoy, to illustrate this quality, says, "we may have recourse to Titian's bunch of grapes, which we will suppose placed so as to receive a broad light and shadow; here, though each individual grape on the light side of the bunch has its light, and shadow, and reflection, yet altogether they make but one broad mass of light; the slightest sketch, therefore, where this breadth is preserved, will have a better effect, will have more the appearance of coming from a master hand, that is, in other words, will have more the characteristic and *generale* of nature, than the most laborious finishing where this breadth is lost or neglected." One method amongst many which we sometimes find Gerard Douw adopting, so as to convey an appearance of high finishing, and yet preserve the breadth of nature, is to give the texture, or surface of an object without altering the tints. For example, in painting a piece of carpet or tapestry, he seems to have laid in his broad lights and shadows, and, while wet, applied a piece of fine cloth, so as to leave an impression of the threads over the whole, then in the high lights to have touched each thread with light, and in the shadow with dark touching, which, did the lines accord with the undulation of the folds, would have given a true appearance of the breadth and detail of nature.

The art of giving a finished look to a picture is one of the most difficult departments of painting, for under it is implied the exact strengthening of the different shades and colours, which defines their relative situations in the picture, the introduction of and detailing the minute parts, without disturbing the great breadth of the whole, and the giving to different substances their several and proper characters. The term finish, when applied to colouring, implies giving to the representations of objects that exact tone which the objects themselves possess in nature under the same circumstances, either by repeated glazings with transparent washes, or by a careful mixture of the colours on the palette in the first instance.

As the principle of placing the light at the side of the picture has already been noticed at Plate III, I shall, in adverting to Fig. 3 of the present plate, merely mention the colour.

The principal light is composed of the white and blue garments of Christ, and repeated in the sky, it being of the same cool tint; the warm light of the angel makes the principal for the head and hands of Christ, and is repeated by a torch carried by figures in the distance. So much cold colour being admitted on the lights, requires the shadows to be kept warm, to prevent the picture from looking heavy; accordingly we find Coreggio has kept the darks of a rich brown: Rembrandt, who was master of this department of art, when his light is cool, makes his shadows the hotter the darker they become; Rubens, who formed his style of colouring upon the Venetian, seems to have been guided by the same opinion. In one of his maxims he says, "Begin by painting in your shadows lightly, taking care that no white is suffered to glide into them; it is the poison of a picture except in the lights; if ever your shadows are

corrupted by the introduction of this baneful colour, your tones will no longer be warm and transparent, but heavy and leady. It is not the same in the lights, they may be loaded with colour as much as you think proper." Whoever examines the works of the great colourists, will find this impasting of the lights, and keeping the shadows rich, juicy, and transparent, was their universal practice. The original of this subject, which is in the possession of the duke of Wellington, has this character, as indeed have all the works from Coreggio's own hand. Opie in his lectures gives a clear definition of Coreggio's management of chiaroscuro, as follows:

"By classing his colours, and judiciously dividing them into few and large masses of bright and obscure, gently rounding off his light, and passing, by almost imperceptible degress, through pellucid demi-tints and warm reflexions, into broad, deep, and transparent shade; he artfully connected the fiercest extremes of light and shadow, harmonized the most intense opposition of colours, and combined the greatest possible *effect* with the sweetest and softest *repose imaginable*."

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## Plate VI. Fig. 1.

I have noticed in another place, that when the darks of the group are brought off the light side of the background, greater firmness is obtained, and more vivacity, which latter is the peculiar character of daylight. Cuyp, by placing his figures in such a position as to throw long shadows across the picture, gives a great appearance of sunshine. If the strong

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Fig. 1.

Cuyp.

Fig. 2.

Vandyke.

Fig. 3.

P. Potter.

Fig. 4.

Cuyp.

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

Rembrandt.

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darks are placed on the delicate half light, instead of on the strong light, they have greater force, as the ground has a more retiring quality: the strong colours have also a more natural appearance, as in the event of colours being opposed to the glare of light, their brilliancy is destroyed.

A few small touches of light are sufficient to convey the light into the dark side of the picture, and to take off the heaviness of the shadows. In compositions, when the background is very dark, we find shining substances, such as mirrors, metal, armour, &c. employed, as they take on a sharp light, and thereby connect the shade with the light without destroying its breadth; on the contrary, they add to its depth.

## *Plate* VI. *Fig.* 2.

When the light part of the group is placed upon the light side of the ground, provided there can be sufficient firmness given, we must of necessity have a greater breadth of effect. Vandyke has in this picture kept the principal light upon the sleeve of the jacket (which makes the most prominent point), and has diffused it upon the sky. The cool tints of the shadows of the jacket, and part of a blue ribbon detach it from the under part of the sky, which is warm. The warm colouring of the boy, and the cloak which he carries, and the king's breeches being of a dull

red, assist the arrangement. The warm colours are carried into the shadow side of the picture by the dun colour of the horse, the stump of the tree, and the saddle cloth. The cool blue of the sky mixes with the foliage of the trees, and prevents it from interfering with the hat, which has greater point in consequence, and balances the shadow side of the picture, besides drawing the attention of the spectator to the head. The warm colour of the flesh necessarily detaches itself from the cool ground; but in such situations we often find Rubens and all his pupils bring strong blue in contact with the head, which gives it a great value, and a luminous effect. We thus perceive a light figure may be strongly relieved even by a light background, provided the colours are opposed to each other; thereby preserving the greatest breadth of light.

*Plate* VI. *Fig.* 3.

We have in this subject the dark of the group brought off the light part of the ground with great firmness, and a very large portion of the outline sharp and cutting, which, though it may give the strong feature of natural objects, has a harsh appearance at first sight. Whether it be that in real objects their actual existence enables them to harmonize with the harshest effects of light and shade; or that the real separation of one part from another, admits of a strength of colour incompatible with a flat surface, such as an outline on canvass, is worthy of the student's examination; as in nature he will often find the most distant parts of an object more sharp and cutting than the nearest outlines, and yet keep their situation. To represent this on canvass requires the most scientific management; as a work may have the strength and freshness of nature, without being a just representation, when the situation of one part with regard to another is taken into the account.

Potter in this picture (in which the objects are of the natural size) has made use of the simplest and firmest principles, as regards light and shade. We have the group strongly defined by part of it coming light off a dark ground, and dark off a light one; we have the composition

taking a decided form in one direction, and the light running across it in another; we have therefore the strong look of nature, which consists of simplicity, decision, and strength.

In the early masters we have these qualities often in a high degree; and had they less of an inlaid flat appearance, would be more valuable than the more harmonious softenings of modern light and shade; but we must never forget that objects in nature are more or less round, that they are delicate as well as forcible, and that the harshest colours are under the influence of light and shade.

*Plate* VI. *Fig.* 4.

The light part of the group is here brought in contact with the light part of the background, and the shadow assisted in its strength by the local colour of the objects placed within it. The yellow cow, which makes the light, is surrounded by others of a dull red and brown, which are relieved by a still darker ground. This gives a great breadth to the group. The cool colour of the upper part of the sky is carried across the picture by the grass and leaves being of a cool green; the dark sharp marking of the horns, eyes, &c. gives a lightness and finish to the whole, as it allows the broad lights and shadows to have more union. In Cuyp the local colour of his objects, whether hot or cold, is kept up undisturbed by the light and shade; this gives great breadth and the distinctness of nature in open daylight.

*Plate* VI. *Fig.* 5.

In this subject we have the light figure upon the dark ground, and vice versa. In nature we often perceive strong effects arising out of simple and decided principles, which, if sketched at the time, will be of the utmost value to the student, by giving him an insight into the science of light and shade; and will often serve as a key to commence with in forming larger combinations. Reynolds mentions a mode of composing

by taking a figure from some celebrated master, and designing others to correspond with it; thereby imparting a grandeur of style to the whole. So, by commencing with something sketched from nature, we give a decided look of truth to the other parts of the picture.

Many painters model their groups for the purpose of obtaining a true representation of the light and shade. Small figures, however rude in form, will serve this purpose, and give the artist many invaluable hints.

Tintoret and Coreggio, both great masters of chiaroscuro, are known to have availed themselves of this method; and the student must have a most erroneous idea of his art, who imagines excellence can be obtained without the assistance of every auxiliary. The most learned arrangements of light and shade may astonish; but there is a charm in the chiaroscuro of nature which carries irresistible sway.

*Plate* VI. *Fig.* 6.

In this subject we have the dark group brought off the light side of the background in the simplest and most decided manner; and the principles of light and shade made applicable to giving the strong look of nature, viz. breadth and solidity to the ground, and light and extent to the sky. Rembrandt has often been accused of being artificial in his effects, but he never misses his aim, either in representing the splendid emanations of light, or the quiet depths of shadow; the peculiar character of an object,

either in texture or in colour, and that appearance, familiar to the recollection of every one; but to convey which, either in poetry or in painting, is only in the power of a few.

Rembrandt seems always to have taken up a leading feature in his works, and never to have lost sight of it. The varieties in his prints are but corroborations of this: as in his anxiety for its preservation we trace him destroying every impediment, either by covering down or burying whole groups in shadow, or by leaving in an unfinished state other groups, with a mere outline to define them. For example, if we take the first state of the print of the great Ecce Homo, we perceive he has made Christ in the centre of a group, in a quiet broad mass of light, with the strong darks gradating from him, right and left, and surrounded by masses of half tint. He has then etched in the principal group, commencing with the figure addressing the multitude, and terminating with the right hand of Pilate. This portion being in strong light, interspersed with a variety of strong darks, acquires by this means great brilliancy and agitation. We have therefore the quiet character of Christ preserved, and his superiority maintained, by his forming the centre of one group, and the apex of the other, rising, as Fuseli describes it, "like a pyramid from the tumultuous waves below."

If we take his print of the Angels appearing to the Shepherds, in the first state we find a broad mass of shadow running through the centre in a diagonal line, thus giving it its greatest magnitude. In the upper part is preserved the principal light, radiating from a centre, with a multitude of children sporting in its beams, and out of which the angel addresses

the shepherds across this gulf of shadow. The second light, which is in the lower portion of the print, he has in the next state, cut up by a number of darks and lights, irregularly dispersed, thus conveying the appearance of confusion and terror to the shepherds, their herds, and flocks, which are represented flying in all directions. These two examples out of many, which the student will discover by his own examination, will suffice to show that light and shade may be made to contribute to the character and fitness of the subject; and that of this adaptation of it, Rembrandt holds unrivalled possession.

## Plate VII.

When a picture is chiefly composed of light and half tint, the darks of the figures must necessarily tell with great force, from there being so little of half shade to rob them of their value; the mid-day sun filling with intense light, every particle of the atmosphere, gives that luminous appearance, which is so strongly characteristic of an out of door effect, the dark local colours of the figures, from the absorption of the rays, retain undiminished power, and give that firmness and vivacity to the scene which prevents it from looking feeble. In nature, figures from their upright position, have a greater consequence from the flat shadows being

Plate 1
OF THE
ROYAL
BEAVOR
OF THE
AVIATION

Fig. 2.

A. Vandivelde.

A. Vandivelde.

Fig. 3.

Claude.

Fig. 4.

J. Ostade.

Fig. 5.

Cuyp.

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weakened by the light of the sky falling into them; for, seeing that the whole heavens are filled with light, it is showered down and reflected in all directions. Also, from their being in motion, they attract the eye; a circumstance to be noticed by the artist, who has to give them their relative value on canvass, as they possess in reality. The consideration of all these circumstances influences many painters, in giving the darks the full force of the palette. As a general character and the leading features of strong daylight are to be purchased at any sacrifice, critics who do not sufficiently investigate these matters, may complain of want of air, but the student, by a close attention to the subject, will not easily be scared by the cry of "*sans vapeur.*"

Birds in the air, boats on the water, figures on the sands, cornfields, or light roads, have all this characteristic feature in a high degree, from the middle tint being on so light a key.

Cuyp often accomplishes this by the general tone of the picture being warm, and his shadows brownish, thereby allowing his blue draperies and cool blacks to have greater point. P. Veronese and Rubens have many pictures on the same principle.

Opposition of colour is of great importance in the treatment of pictures on a light key, as it gives great relief and distinctness without cutting up the breadth of light; such as blue upon a warm ground, or red upon a cool one, bright yellow upon a cool gray, &c. In No. 3, Claude has made great use of such opposition. The general appearance of the picture is warm, the dark blue of the water is carried across the piece by the dark blue draperies of some of the figures, and is suffused upon

the upper part of the sky. The red is interspersed upon the boats and the draperies of the other figures; and, warming the near part of the buildings, is repeated at the top by a figure looking over the balcony and two red flags upon the blue of the sky. He has placed two blue flags upon the warm part of the sky to repeat the cool colour.

Pictures painted on a dark key have already been noticed as possessing many advantages, which have led our greatest colourists to its adoption. But as low toned pictures are apt to look heavy and black, unless richness of shadows, or sharpness of lights be preserved; so pictures painted on a light key are apt to look flat and unfinished, unless the greatest circumspection be used. In nature, the intense light of the sky, and the atmosphere, which is filled with its innumerable refractions, spread a luminous character over the whole scene; to represent which the artist can employ only a greater degree of whiteness, a very inadequate quality, and hence the great difficulty of imitating the splendid brightness of mid-day, or the brilliant effects of an evening sky. In treating the one, unless the delicate varieties of the half lights are attended to with the greatest care, the picture will look crude and unfinished; for the tints being so nearly allied to each other, the exact sharpness to define them, and their exact tone, either by repeated scumbling, or, mixing them to the proper tint in the first instance, require an attention and study of the most refined quality; without which the shadows will be powdery instead of pearly, or the lights white instead of luminous. In the other arrangement the yellow tones may become solid and foxy, if deprived of the delicate cool tints so necessary to prevent their appearing too hot, and to give the whole, that tremulous unsteady appearance which light possesses in nature.

Light pictures, from the tenderness of their light and shade, require the colours opposed to each other, whether blue opposed to red, or yellow to cool gray, to be managed with the greatest delicacy; otherwise their strength will destroy all appearance of light and air. In light pictures strong colours can stand only as middle tint, or for leading the light into the shade, but can appear as lights only by being relieved by strong shadow. We often find them, as in P. Veronese, &c. standing as darks, or made use of to give objects an appearance of solidity, without breaking up the general mass of light in the picture.

## Plate VIII.

I shall here recur to the subject of middle tint, for the purpose of taking a general view of the various modes of arranging this important branch of light and shade; as upon the strength of the middle tint depends, in a great measure, the general look of the picture. By the middle tint is meant the medium between the extreme dark and extreme light; but as such a scale is too gross to take in all the gradations lying between so opposite qualities, I have, for the sake of clearness, made use of intermediate links, *viz.* half dark and half light. If we take a ground of a shade composed chiefly of half dark and middle tint, and introduce the strongest lights, we shall find it necessary to introduce a portion of half light to spread and break down their harshness. If the extreme dark is placed upon the middle tint, it will by contrast render it more in union with the half light; if it be placed on the half dark, a breadth of shadow and softness will be the result. Harshness of effect in treating pictures upon a dark scale arises, most commonly from the want of sufficient quantities of middle tint and half light, thereby causing the principal light to be too much defined; as we frequently observe in the works of Michael Angelo Carravagio.

Rembrandt and Coreggio excelled all others in the introduction of demi tints, which illuminate their deepest shadows. In their works and in

Fig 1.

Hondekoeter.

Fig 2.

Wouwermans.

Teniers.

Fig 4.

Fig 5.

Frank. Hals.

Fig 6.

Titian.

Pubd July 1826 by Carpenter & Son, Old Bond Street.

nature we perceive the lowest tones of middle tint are removed from blackness, either by their warmth, or the introduction of some positive black or blue, to produce an appearance of air floating within them.

The exact quantity of middle tint must depend upon the arrangement of the subject and the taste of the painter; but it is absolutely necessary, to prevent it from always interposing betwixt the extreme light and extreme dark.

This invariably gradual declination of the light into the shadow, is one cause of the insipid look of most of Vanderwerf's works, nor is it, as Sir Joshua Reynolds justly observes, consonant with the effects in nature. Variety demands some portion of the composition to be sharp and cutting; and richness is to be obtained only, by a continual changing of portions coming sometimes dark and sometimes light off the ground; this endless variety in nature can be imitated only, by this intricate weaving of the outline with the background: so that the same sound principles which guide the conduct in the treatment of the whole, may be traced in the management of the detail.

Middle tint, in pictures painted on a light key, ought to be in some measure robbed of its consequence, either by the introduction of reflected lights, or positive half lights; for if it occupies too large a portion of the canvass, the work must of necessity lose its characteristic feature. We must therefore depend upon some other agent to prevent the picture being flimsy, and void of that solidity which is so inherent in the most delicate of nature's works. Accordingly we find small sharp darks introduced, the value of which has been noticed in another place; and

(what is of the utmost importance) a sharp edge to the lights and half shadows throughout the whole.

The light pictures of Teniers and Cuyp are full of this precision in the touch, a flatness in the shades, a sharpness in the handling, and a distinctness in the most approximate colours; by this alone a general breadth can be preserved, and the most splendid light (even of a sky,) filled with a multitude of forms.

In this notice of middle tint or ground of the picture, I may appear to have recapitulated what has already been said in other parts of the work; but my anxiety to put the student in possession of every information in my power urges me to place it before his eyes in every point of view.

The management of light and shade, as relates to a whole, ought to be always present in the student's mind, as it is from inattention to this alone that a work is often destroyed in its progress. In the commencement of a picture those parts only are strongly defined, or marked in, which are of the greatest importance; and the other portions are left in a broader and less obtrusive state. But in the progress of the work the proper subordination of the latter is often injuriously diminished.

The general character of an object is its most important feature, and this is to be preserved at the price of every other quality, if it cannot be retained upon other terms; as it is this which is imprinted on the mind of every one, and which is therefore paramount to all its other properties. If the object does not possess this feature upon the canvass, it cannot

attract or interest the spectator, as in all probability its other properties are unveiled except to the artist alone, who has examined it attentively. For example, in a portrait, when we see the head alone finished, it often pleases more than when the work is complete; our attention is led involuntarily to the countenance, which would be the case were we introduced to the original; and this preponderance, which exists in nature, must of necessity become less when in the finished work the other portions of the picture have received a greater consequence. The importance of the countenance, the general character of the flesh, *viz.* its transparency, breadth of local colour, luminous appearance, &c. may be all lost from the injudicious introduction, in the other parts of the picture, of lights, darks, and middle tints, in the artist's anxiety for richness of effect, or in his wish to give splendour and harmony by the strength or variety of his colours.

In sketching a landscape from nature, when we have time only to put down the leading features, detailing such objects alone as are striking or interesting, we find the spectator often more satisfied from feeling a corresponding sensation from the truth of the representation imprinted on his mind, than when, in a more finished work, the painter has destroyed the great breadth and luminous character of the sky for the purpose of mixing the shadows of the clouds with the trees, &c. to counteract flatness, or when he has subdued the strength of his colours for the sake of taking off their harshness. When he begins to define the different parts for the sake of finish, unless he has the treatment of the picture as a whole constantly before his eye, the expansive look of the sky, the fresh and decided appearance of nature in the colours, the gray tones and soft

markings of the aerial perspective may all disappear, and give place to requisites of an inferior kind.

In all objects in nature there is something predominant, and which alone has struck the observation of every one. If the artist gives that, he brings his object at once home "to men's bosoms," and without which his greatest labour is but industrious trifling. The character of an object depends upon a particular colour, a particular touch, a particular concentration or diffusion of light, according to its form or substance; to obtain which ought to be the constant study of the student, as it is the language of his art, and the only language universally understood.

I have in these brief notices of the art of light and shade, endeavoured to point out the various modes of establishing a scientific arrangement of its powers, and applying them to any subject the student may have in hand. The changes are infinite; but, by an attentive examination of the effects in nature or in art, he will find the sources from which they arise few and simple. Opie in his lectures, speaking of chiaroscuro, strongly recommends the study of the several masters who have excelled in this department of the art, "By studying the works of the great masters of chiaroscuro, he will by degrees become acquainted with all the artifices of contrasting light to shade, colour to colour, to produce relievo, of joining light objects together, and dark objects together, in masses, in order to give splendour and breadth of effect; of gradually sinking some objects wholly or partly in shadow, and losing their outlines in the ground, to produce softness and harmony; and of making, in other places, abrupt breaks and sharp transitions, to produce vivacity and spirit. He will

also learn their rules for shaping their masses, and of adapting them in regard to force or softness to the nature of the subject, whether grave or gay, sublime or terrible. By this he must be directed when to give his light the form of a globe, or when to send it in a stream across his canvass; when to make a dark mass on a light ground, or a light mass on a dark ground; when he may let his light die away by imperceptible gradations, when diffuse it in greater breadth and abundance, and when it may more properly be concentrated into one vivid flash." This is so excellent, and embraces so many of the best modes of the management of light and shade, that the student, who can comprehend them and put them in practice, requires no farther instruction in this part of the art. He will be in possession of a key to unlock the richest stores of nature; he will be in possession of a sort of short hand to note down her most fleeting effects; and by understanding the cause which gives them existence, rivet them in his memory. Without having accustomed himself to this mode of arranging his observations, his life will be spent in an endless search after that which is continually passing before his eyes.

Light and shade, considered as a means of producing a deception, by making parts of the picture advance, and other parts retire, so that every thing may keep its relative situation, as regards the distance from the spectator, is a necessary attendant upon perspective. It is, however, often violated in the best works, for the purpose of giving a general breadth, or of preserving the light in a good shape; but, when compatible with both these, it is of the utmost consequence; and the painter can enter into a competition with nature only by a perfect knowledge of the best modes of adapting it to such purpose.

Richness of effect, either by a mixture of the light and shade, so as to give an appearance of doubling to the outline, or by relieving the outline by a ground possessed of a variety of strengths. And distinctness of form, surrounded by flatness, when we wish any part to attract notice, or to preserve the expression undisturbed, are both under the dominion of chiaroscuro, to whose controul the whole array of colours yields implicit obedience.

The application of light and shade, in a poetical point of view, is capable of creating an association of ideas, without which the imagination of the spectator would experience nothing but disappointment. For example, if we represent a scene remarkable for disasters or shipwrecks, the mind is excited, and an expectation raised, which none but an artist imbued with the poetry of the art can gratify, by clothing the scene in all the ominous effects of elemental strife: whether the shadow

> Strangles the travelling lamp:
> * * * * * * * * * *
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
> When living light should kiss it?——

or

> "The sky seems to pour down stinking pitch,
> But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek,
> Dashes the fire out."

Shakspeare, who was possessed of all the poetry of the art, clothes his scenery with those circumstances which awaken a thousand pleasing or awful sensations as the subject may require; whether

> "The gray ey'd morn smiles on the frowning night,
> Checkering the eastern clouds with streaks of light."

Whether

> " The glorious sun
> Stays in his course and plays the alchemist;
> Turning with splendour of his precious eye
> The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold."

or when

> " Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood."

or when he bids

> " Thick night
> Pall herself in the dunnest smoke of hell!"

We have him adopting the softness and breadth of Coreggio, the splendour and gorgeous effects of Veronese, Rubens, or Cuyp, or the ominous twilight and midnight darkness of Rembrandt or Michael Angelo Carravagio. His light and shade is the chiaroscuro of nature passing through a mind susceptible of its finest impressions, and capable of placing such effects before the eye of the spectator, " unshorn of their beams," or unimpaired in their sublimity.

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